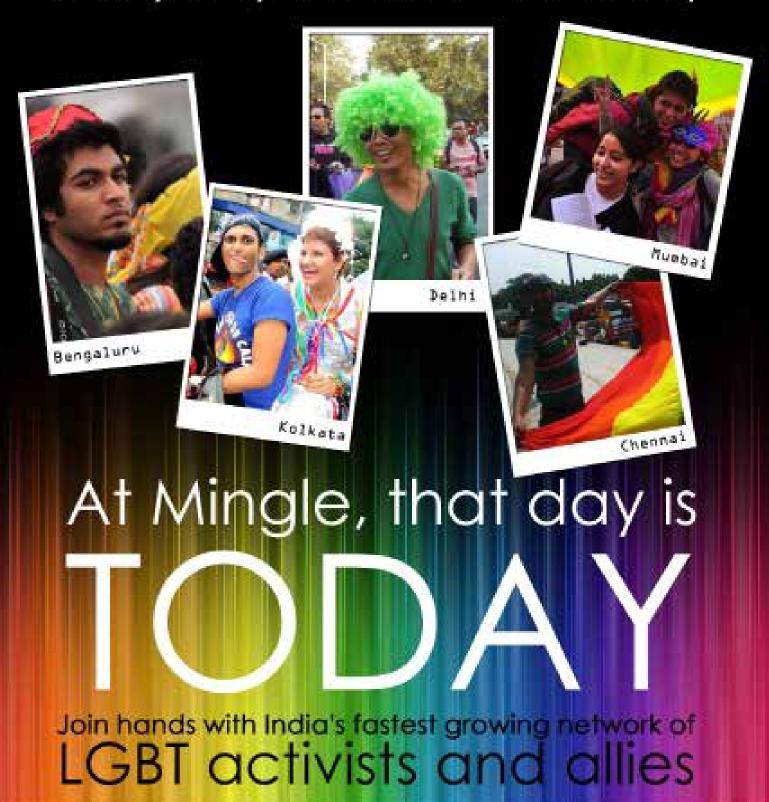


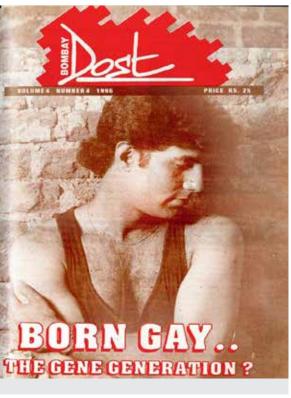
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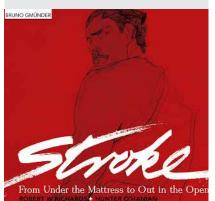
One day, every day will be a Pride Day.





Mission for Indian Gay & Lesbian Empowerment भारतीय समलैंगिक सशक्तिकरण मिशन







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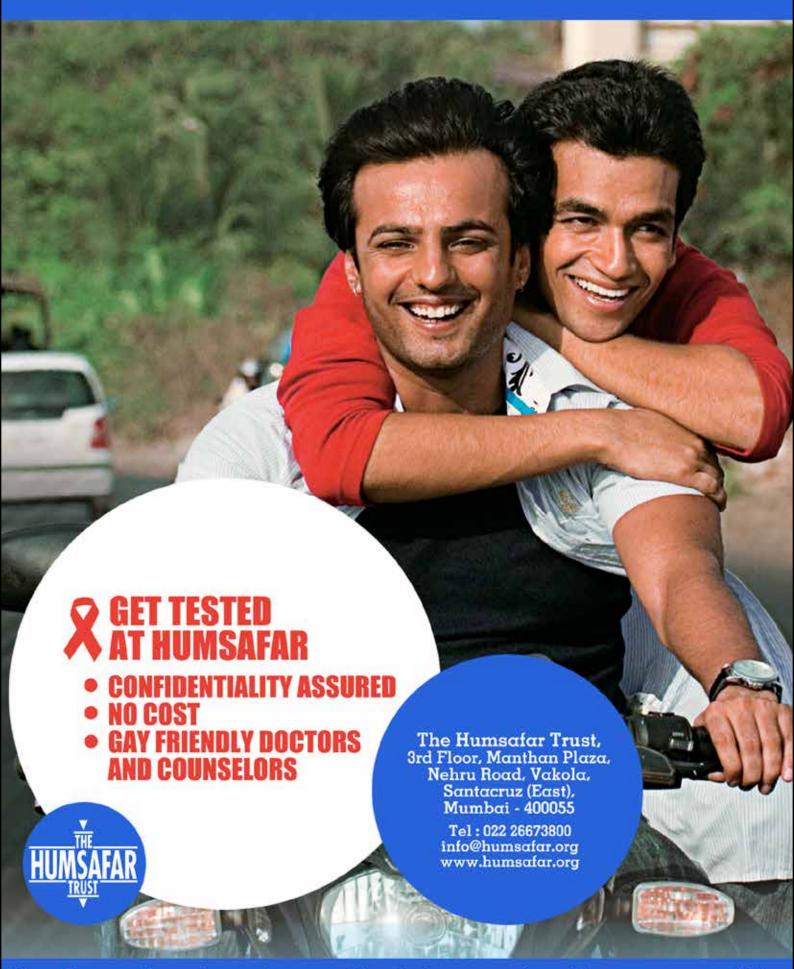
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Come home to Humsafar... where your identity is a reason for pride not a reason to hide.







FROM THE EDITOR

As 2015 draws to an end, in this issue we look back at some of the events and people who grabbed our attention this year. While the country moved ahead in the area of transgender rights, Section 377 continued to remain on the statute books of the world's largest democracy. In fact, as many have already pointed out, even progress on transgender rights will remain incomplete as long as their sexual lives continue to be criminalized.

rans rights, Section 377 and queer Dalits

The political apathy around gay rights became glaringly evident on December 18th, when the Lok Sabha- with its overwhelming BJP majority refused to even admit Shashi Tharoor's private member's bill on Section 377 for a debate. While this effectively dashed all hopes generated in the last few weeks- triggered by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's supportive comments, it is also a wakeup call for our community. If the flippancy which our Parliamentarians treated the issue of our dignity and human rights does not enrage us into action, I do not know what else will. If this does not bring home the importance of making ourselves visible and our voices heard- in our homes, universities, workplaces and communities, the future for gay rights looks bleak in this country.

Before I wrap up, let me also share my views on a something that generated some degree of controversy within the LGBT community. The Pride march in Delhi last month saw a confident assertion of Dalit gay pride, thanks to a bunch of spirited activists. Expectedly, some participants felt that issues like caste need not be addressed on LGBT forums, and that doing so might hurt our movement. I feel this is an unfair criticism of queer Dalits- who have experienced marginalization on multiple fronts. I can only applaud the efforts of these activists to bring more inclusion within our communities, and hope that they will be able to raise LGBT issues with equal fervor on Dalit forums as well.

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2015: THE INDIAN LGBT YEAR IN REVIEW

While internationally 2015 was a momentous year for the LGBT rights movement- with marriage equality becoming the law of the land in the United States through a Supreme Court ruling, and in Ireland through popular vote, in India the year was marked with considerable progress on transgender rights, and a continued sidelining of gay rights by the political mainstream. However, sustained efforts by activists, business leaders, writers and film makers kept the issue alive and kicking. Here's a quick wrap-up of the events & people that grabbed our attention this year...

News Event of the year: Indian Parliament passes trans-rights bill



In April this year, the Rajya Sabha passed 'The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill 2014' introduced by a DMK MP, sending a positive message to the transgender community. The bill has 58 clauses and it comprises measures to bring the transgender community into the mainstream. The bill demands reservation for the community in education, financial assistance and social inclusion.

Homophobic act of the year: India's anti-gay vote at the UN

In March this year, a Russian effort to stop the United Nations from offering marital benefits to employees with same-sex spouses was turned back in a diplomatic campaign led by the U.S. and the European Union. However, India was one of the countries that did support Russia in this anti-gay action. Justifying the vote External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Syed Akbaruddin said, "It was a complex issue of nationals of a state should be governed by their laws or governed by decisions of others."



Newsmaker of the year: Radhika Piramal



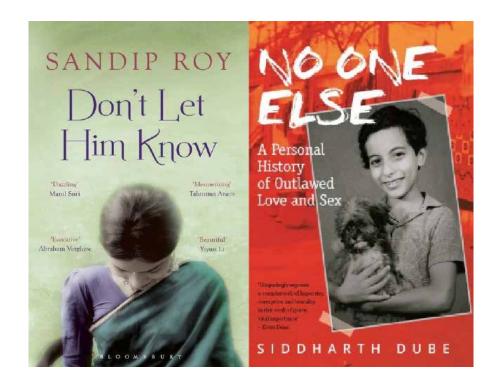
Radhika Piramal- Managing Director of the VIP Industries group spoke publicly for the first time about her coming out journey, and her experiences as an openly gay corporate leader in India, making it the big coming out story of the year. She was speaking at an event at the Godrej campus, and also had a candid interview with the Economic Times the following week in October.

LGBT Ally of the year: Shashi Tharoor

While many political leaders- most notably Finance Minister Arun Jaitley spoke up for LGBT Indians this year, it was Congress Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor- who took the first actionable step to decriminalize homosexuality through the Parliamentary route. Tharoor earned the applause of the LGBT community when immediately after Delhi's Pride march he announced on social media that he had initiated a private members' bill in Parliament to strike down Section 377. Although the bill got rejected at a very nascent stage in the Lok Sabha, Tharoor has promised to try again in the future- this time better prepared.



LGBT Books of the year

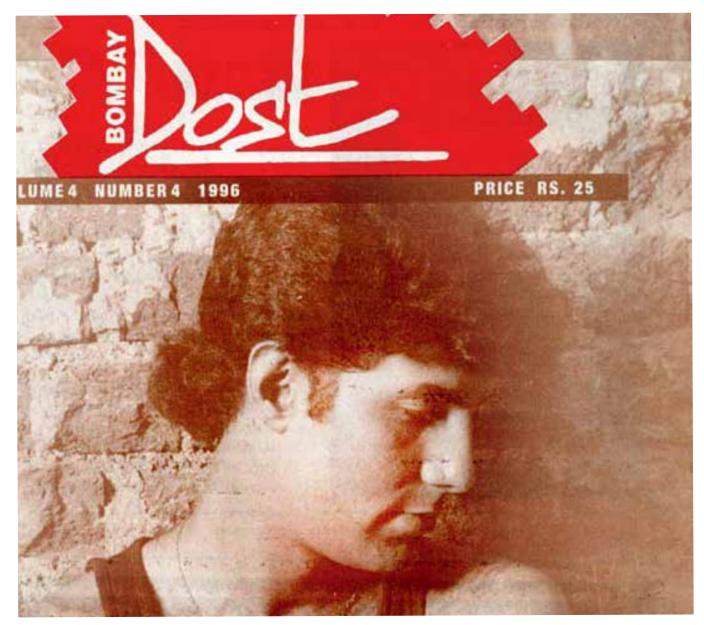


In the Fiction category, "Don't Let Him Know" by Sandip Roy grabbed attention not just in India but even abroad with raving reviews and a new French translation. The novel is about an Indian-American family that confronts old secrets in modern times. In the non-fiction genre, Siddharth Dube's "No One Else", which happens to be India's first gay memoir is a personal narrative of outlawed love and sex in India in the backdrop of homophobia and an emergent AIDS crisis.

LGBT Film of the year: Aligarh

Hansal Mehta's film "Aligarh" is based on the real life incident of Dr. Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras, who was suspended from his job because of his sexual orientation. Siras was professor of Marathi at the Aligarh Muslim University, and was secretly filmed getting intimate with another man. It's noteworthy for its groundbreaking content and some brilliant acting by Manoj Bajpayee.





ON THE

FRONTLINES

How India's LGBT community is fighting the HIV/AIDS health crisis

BY DEVASHISH SHARMA

n 12th December 2013, India's LGBT community collectively moaned at the incredible imposition of the Victorian-era Section 377. Since then the flag bearers of the community have used every platform available to stage their resentment and mistrust against the oppressive law, in what happens to be the world's most populous democracy. But even as this small but optimistic group of Indian LGBT activists is determined to continue the on-going battle to secure social and legal acceptance, life has taken its downhill turn for LGBTs living with HIV/AIDS. Among other factors, an ongoing struggle between the states and the center has introduced a funding crisis affecting HIV/AIDS prevention programs across India.

In order to understand the intensity of what has been called a crisis, and how it has worsened the lives of already struggling people with HIV, I interviewed prominent activists Ashok Row Kavi, Pallay Patankar and Gautam Yaday.

Excerpts from the dialog:

The history of HIV/AIDS in India

Ashok Row Kavi: In India the very first case of HIV was detected amongst sex workers in Chennai. Following this, in 1986 a business man in Bombay was diagnosed with HIV by Doctor Sundar Raman and Sri Suniti Solomon. Soon after, I was invited by a group of gay men to participate at the 5th International AIDS conference in Montreal in 1989.

The history was quite interesting. First detected among gay men in the US, it was then coined as GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency). Its origin was traced to Haiti in the Caribbean. AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa was already quite chronic. Another interesting fact was that in Africa, its transmission was almost entirely heterosexual. The situation was tough in Montreal as the government was quite homophobic- it was a hell like situation for gay men. When I returned I was very much concerned about its severity in India.

In order to spread awareness and to create a platform for our people I founded Bombay Dost magazine in 1990. After the first issue was out, we received thousands of letters from people appreciating our unprecedented step towards the recognition of alternate sexualities. While planning Bombay Dost we decided that we will do it overboard and underground. The first thing I did was to get it registered. We had the Veena Beena shopping Centre where we received all the mails. Bombay Dost gave us the platform to spread awareness- even on basic topics like what is the full form of HIV and AIDS. In those days many gay men were not

aware of transmission risks. We found in Bombay that around 30 to 40 percent of them had some or the other kind of STD. There was a 11% HIV prevalence and we can proudly say that we have brought it down to 7%, but sadly we fear it might go up again because state support now seems to be lacking.

How Humsafar Trust created an impact

Ashok Row Kavi: Humsafar trust works mainly on four components. First, community outreach and mobilization. The main objective is to have deep roots into the community and fight all kinds of harassment.

Then we have a range of counsellors. They help men through sexual distress counseling, family counseling, free HIV testing etc. We are trusted and respected in our workplace. Even hospitals trust us and send people to get tested at our centers. Apart from that we also have various support groups.

Third would be advocacy, about providing legal aid. And then finally, we do a lot of research- we are proud to have published 17 papers altogether. We now have more than 200 employees. 30% of our funding comes from the community while there is some contribution from government.

The impact of Section 377 on grass roots HIV/AIDS workers

There was 11% HIV prevalence and we can proudly say that we brought it down to 7%







Gautam Yadav

Gautam Yadav: There has been a great deal of trouble for outreach workers and field workers whose main objective is to go to the cursing sites and encourage and educated men about condoms. Police thinks that we are there to promote unnatural sex, but actually we are working for the prevention of HIV. And that's why we often face abuse by the police and authorities.

Often we are targeted by police men dressed in civilian clothing. They arrive at these places, observe our work, and after disguising as gay men interact with the men present. Soon, they reveal their true identities and demand money with the threat that otherwise they would report them to their families.

The recent funding crisis

JVR Prasada Rao, a former head of NACO

and health secretary, currently the UN Secretary General's envoy for AIDS in Asia recently told Caravan magazine about the issues that have created the current funding crisis in India, putting lives at risk. "The attitude is that, we have won the battle against AIDS, we have managed to control it. I have seen this happen in recent years across Asian countries—Thailand, China, Cambodia, and Philippines. So, at that stage, we go and talk to the people heading the programme to urge them to not lose momentum."

Prasada Rao sounded an unequivocal warning about the government's attitude. "The situation will be terrible," he said. "India is on the brink. It can aim to eliminate the disease or it can go the way of the Philippines." Without quick action, he said, "infection trends will reverse and we will see higher incidences of new cases. If India continues to be complacent, more

II

"Gay rights, one sandy shore at a time, but only if you can pay your way there..."

and more people will die."

In 2012, one of the programme's biggest external donors, the GFATM, announced a \$187 million grant for Phase IV. This was lower than its contributions in previous years, but nevertheless represented a substantial commitment. As is standard procedure, to access the funds the government was required to submit a detailed proposal explaining exactly how the money would be used. But it failed to follow through with this step, and for the next two years, the grant was left untapped. Where funds were available, they were often held up, in large part due to a decision, taken by the UPA government in early 2014, to change the way money was transferred for all health programmes. Prasada Rao believes that the present system is mired in the politics between the centre and the states. "The NDA government inherited this system from UPA but they can't change it because states are very powerful," he said. "So now, everyone is stuck with this system and we need some kind of innovative approach to circumvent it."

Gautam Yadav: The biggest problem is the ongoing shortage and stock-outs of medications. Being an HIV positive and working professional it's difficult for me to go to hospitals very often. If an HIV positive person loses dosage for a day he eliminates 40 days from his life instantly. The situation has gone so bad for some people that they are having to borrow medicines from their other infected friends. Often, the hospital gives you second line treatment even if you are to be treated with first line medication, because they do not have enough medicines at their disposal.

The many challenges of HIV/AIDS prevention

Pallav Patankar: Most of the grass root workers get a salary between Rs.5-10 thousand. It's difficult to survive with that kind of money especially in Mumbai. Then again there is irregularity in salary distribution. Because of all this the health programme suffers. ART centers also face difficulty in the distribution of medicine because of the ongoing medicine crunch.

Recently, there was a talk about integrating healthcare services. The government wants us to access public healthcarethey are totally ignoring the fact that there exists stigma against LGBT and especially hijras making it impossible for them to access public healthcare services. For example if you are going to an ART center there is more possibility of a woman with children getting her medication first instead of a gay man. Most of the times they will delay the medications for gay men and often they don't get their medications because of stock crunch. Hijras are often mocked at government hospitals- no wonder they refuse going to these centers for their treatments. Also, if the funding crisis is not resolved quickly, HIV prevalence will spiral out of control.

Hijras are often mocked at government hospitals - no wonder they refuse going to these centers for their treatments.

Pallav Patankar





PRIDE IN KERALA

PICTURES BY SREEKESH RAVEENDRAN NAIR

In July 2015, Kerala's capital city hosted its first ever LGBT Pride march on Saturday with nearly 200 community members and allies marching down the streets in the sixth edition of the Kerala 'Queer Pride March'.

Here are a bunch of pictures of the event by documentary photographer Sreekesh Raveendran Nair. "Kerala, despite its high literacy rates, is still obstinate and most intolerant state when it comes to sexual minorities. Despite the online revelry, Malayalis are yet to come in terms with concepts like same-sex love and gender fluidity", Nair tells Pink Pages. "While gays and lesbians have the convenience of staying invisible, transgenders face the worst torment, going through endless loops of insult even from the elite and the educated."

Highlighting the significance of Pride marches, he says "For the community members, Pride March is also an announcement, an attempt at spreading awareness and reaching out to people who lack any access to peer groups and LGBT communities."





NOT REGRETTING MY PAST

BY ANWESH KUMAR SAHOO

ontrary to the reaction that I often receive from people, being gay in a country likes ours isn't in fact half as bad. While growing up gay didn't make it any easier for me to deal with people around me, I can't honestly complain for two crucial reasons. During my years of self-denial I learnt some very important lessons in life. I remember crying for nights, randomly scribbling on my desk and asking God-'Why me?' That's when I realized if we all start throwing away our problems into a heap; we'd want to take our heap back. The biggest reason why we constantly battle our insecurities is because we compare our behind-the-scenes real life with the happening reel-lives of others. Life is equally perfect and distorted for all of us and we have the ability to make the best of our situations.

There was also a part of me that regretted not having as many friends around and

being constantly picked on at school. That's exactly when I came across my second lesson- "God often uses the most foolish things in life to make us confront the wise." Don't regret your past, because you're not going that way. You are stronger than you think you are and more often than not, your weakness could be your biggest strength. My sexuality taught me the most significant things in life that I couldn't have learned otherwise. Coming out completely changed my life. I was finally able to love and respect myself for who I was. I was finally able to live my life and unapologetically be the way I wanted to be.

When I moved into college, the one thing that I was very apprehensive about was living with other guys. The first day gave me a flash back of all the names I was called as a kid and how alienated I felt throughout school. One week down the line and I knew I wasn't going to let that happen again, because this time I wasn't scared. I wasn't scared of people calling me gay, bisexual, transsexual or any other fancy sexuality they wanted to associate me with. Because who gives a damn? We anyway didn't fit into their societal norms; we defined it for ourselves. I now took pride in associating myself with the queer community. I started realizing how fun it could be to live in a same-sex hostel when you're attracted to that very sex. I could laugh now at how silly I was to fall for a straight senior and cry in my friend's arms. I realized how amazing I was at making friends and that I always had the ability to be a confident individual. Sometimes you are the only one

you have to fight. If there are people who are curious (or ignorant?) enough to ask me if I have estrogen in my body, there are also people who treat me respect and dignity. If you don't put what you think you deserve for yourself on the table, no one will think of offering it to you. And at the same time you can be the sweetest peach in the world, but there is still going to be someone who doesn't like peaches. And that's how life is for everyone- gay or straight.

One cannot deny that life is about the choices one makes. And I've made the choice to live my life as a dignified, independent and equal individual. I don't want my life to be all about struggles. I want my life to be as much about happiness. I will fight for the rights I am entitled to. But I definitely don't want to miss out on the joy of living through the milestones in life that one expects to live through- first kiss, graduation, birthdays, marriage or may be the addition of a new member into the family. God doesn't make mistakes. And I will so not pity myself for the super-power I was born with. After all, when life gives you lemons, shouldn't we make lemonade out of it?

(Anwesh is an Engineering student in Delhi. Besides writing, he's a lover of old-school Indian art, music and fashion. He writes a blog named 'The Effeminare' which he considers his parallel universe filled with self-introspection, crazy ideas and miracles that he cannot stop believing in.)



One cannot deny that life is about the choices one makes.

WALKING TO SANTIAGO

he Pyrenees. I am crossing what is a border in the view of some people. I gather the beauty of these mountains in my mantra; a mantra repeated every morning by my grandmother. She herself was a migrant, moving from India to marry my grandfather. When he died many years later, she was almost entirely paralyzed. But her fingers kept traveling along a rosary. Now, as I am crossing the Pyrenees, I have brought this mantra with me. But it is not a static thing. I harvest some of the beauty around me and mix it with the mantra as if I were brewing a magic potion in a cauldron: The rustling leaves in the wind, the swaying green trees, the birds singing, and the vast blue sky. There are hardly any other words now, only the exchanges of a buen camino with other pilgrims I meet.

As evening comes, I walk behind an older couple, leaning on walking sticks and each other. I loose myself in thoughts: Were we not supposed to walk this road together as well, my lover and I? I feel a pain in the chest. My heart is broken. He did not die. We broke up, a different kind of death, also difficult. But perhaps I need to walk this stretch of life alone. How does that saying go? The heart is sometimes broken in order for God to truly enter and take possession of us. I arrive at a monastery and participate in

the communion.

The next morning I look to the sky and see the rainbow, the token from the Old Testament God that he will never again let the earth flood. I repeat my mantra. Soon there is a melody. I sing the sound. I almost dance along the path. I notice a small cave, and something tells me I should meditate there. I crawl in and settle down in this dark and dirty space. I close my eyes for a moment. When I open them, I see something red painted on one of the stones. It is the Sacred Heart. Poor peasants reported the first appearances of these hearts at a time when Christianity had become cruel in Europe, too focused on the cross as a symbol of suffering and guilt.

Along the way I find other hearts and the words Dios es amor drawn in pebbles. God is love.

A monastery offers pilgrims wine from a tap on the roadside. I drink, and it is good. I remember having read somewhere that it is among the greatest sins to have lived and not enjoyed the pleasures of life. Later an old farmer invites me into his garden to pick some apples. I am filled with gratitude, and as I continue walking, I offer an apple to another pilgrim in the passing. I am thankful for every opportunity to do even the smallest good deed, to give without the left hand knowing

BY VIKRAM KOLMANNSKOG

A monastery offers pilgrims wine from a tap on the roadside.



what the right hand does. In the forest I meet a wild boar. We have both come to eat chestnuts.

One morning a thick fog comes upon us. I walk behind another pilgrim who has a flashlight. He turns out to be from Denmark. Before long he starts complaining about the refugees in his country. I do not enter into discussion. I hope for dialogue. I start talking about the camino. Are we not also migrants of one sort or another? Carrying only a rucksack and a walking stick, we are also at the mercy and the good will of others on this road. It starts to rain and I stop to change clothes. I say farewell to the man from Denmark, buen camino.

One afternoon I sit in the cool shade of a generous tree, watching small insects dancing around each other, glinting like tiny lights in the sun. I have arrived at the Hill of Forgiveness. I ask all creatures for forgiveness. I also think of harsh words I have spoken and misdeeds I have done to my ex-lover. In meditation I ask forgiveness from him, from everyone and everything.

Late one night I reach the foot of another mountain. I will meet God on this mountain. I already know this. But tonight I sleep here, at the foot of the mountain, alone in the night and shadow of God. Again I feel this longing for my lover. I forgive myself as well, and I enter into some kind of prayer. And I have already received it: I see his face. I gently kiss his lips. We are on the way somewhere and have stopped at a train station. He says something funny, and I laugh. I laugh so much that I wake myself up.

I smile to myself in the darkness. I surrender, and I have faith. I fall asleep to this, the softest of God's songs, the sound of light rain at night.

Who are you? Someone has written in the sand. There are question marks, no certain exclamations, on the way up the mountain. The world is slowly coloured violet red. Everything, even the tiniest pebbles on the forest path, casts shadows and is present. I am in and with my surroundings. The path becomes increasingly steeper and harder to climb, so hard that I am only aware of my breath. And the body itself knows how to breathe. It is a giving birth kind of breathing.

I am on a higher level now. It is almost as if I can touch the clouds. For a moment I think that I have lost my way up here and panic. But then I notice that someone has laid out stones on the ground in a spiral. Someone has been here before me. I move towards the centre, all the while repeating my mantra. Various words and images have been deposited beneath the stones. I also sketch something on a small piece of paper and leave it here for others who will come after me. I expand the spiral, an ever-expanding spiral, with one more stone. Overwhelmed, I start to cry. I am at the highest point in the world. I rest my eyes on the clouds. I realise that they are angels that we have helped create through our mere existence, our tears, our sweat and our breath. I give thanks.

I walk for several days on the flat and yellow Castilian plateau.

There is less lust and longing. I am listening now. I arrive at some ruins. The place is eerie, but I have made a decision. Today I am going to make a heart of great magnitude. I fill my water bottle from a well and drink some of the fresh water. Then I start collecting stones. It is not hard work. But then suddenly there is a great gust of wind and I hear something resembling a scream. I grow fearful, but continue my work, repeating my mantra. Once I have created a heart among the ruins, I bless this place and take my leave. Arriving in the village where I will spend the night, I am told that the water from the well has healing powers and that the ruins are the remnants of an old Jewish community, abandoned during the Christian Reconquista.

There is a festival when I arrive in Leon. But first I go to the small, quiet park of Saint Francis of Assisi. His statue is surrounded by bird song and generous green plants. Praised be the Lord for all his creatures! Later on, in the city, I hear a scream again. As part of the festivities an eagle has been tied to a pillar in the middle of the market place. For show. As a curiosity. Other than us. It screams desperately like a child, and my heart aches. I look at the eagle, and I do not know what else I can do but quietly ask for forgiveness. The screams haunt me for days when I see other eagles flying high and free above me on the plain.

One night towards the end of my journey, I lie down on my back in a corpse pose. Normally, I make sure not to fall asleep like this. It always gives me nightmares. And true enough, around midnight it happens, but I am ready. A big, black, feline form attacks. I repeat my mantra, and it is as if I strangle this feline shadow. I throw it off me and spit on it. I am between the waking condition and sleep, and when I have fulfilled my mission, met this demon, I wake myself up with a start. I am thirsty and drink water in the dark night. I am not afraid.

I arrive in green and humid Galicia. I walk

in the morning mist where all things seem to merge. On a sign someone has written todo se cumple. Everything will be fulfilled. I feel a sudden warm touch on my back, and the mist lifts as if by magic. I turn, take in the first sunlight and sing my mantra. The soft warm morning also embraces the oaks surrounding me. I look at these beautiful, illuminated trees. A cool dewdrop full of light falls from one of the branches onto my forehead. When walking again, I feel that I am deeply grounded in the earth and at the same time stretching towards the sky.

While refugees are washed ashore on the Spanish south coast, I arrive in Santiago de Compostela. Again I meet with other pilgrims, including the man from Denmark, and we share a meal. My mother has also come to join me here. After a visit to the church, we continue together towards Land's End, the ultimate point of an even more ancient pilgrimage route. Along the way she teaches me about plants and we collect seeds to take back home. On a hilltop we stop to collect white pebbles. For an eternity my mother and I remain in childlike play. We sense that it is of utmost importance that we carry out this mission. We are creating a white heart of pebbles together here on the hilltop. When completed, we continue walking towards the glimmering ocean in the horizon. The mantra is in each breath of air now, like a continuous prayer or meditation. I arrive in each step I take now, like my grandmother traveling along the rosary while sitting still on her bed. At Land's End I undress and enter into the sea. The Atlantic.

Vikram Kolmannskog lives in Oslo, Norway. He was raised by a Hindu mother and a Christian father. The travelogue is based on a journey he undertook after a difficult breakup. The Camino de Santiago, or the Way of Saint James, is an old pilgrimage route in Europe that has its end point in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, where the apostle Saint James is said to have arrived.



One night towards the end of my journey, I lie down on my back in a corpse pose





QUEERING LOVE: THE SONG OF DUSK

BY SANDEEP

It's Sunday afternoon and I watch a quarrel of sparrows around my feet, pecking at grains scattered by the local grocer. I perch on my favourite bench under a tree near my house with Dr. Amartya Sen's book on justice beside me. I had often quoted his works in my lectures. My students knew that the only way to get the usually calm and gentle Professor animated was to argue against Dr. Sen's theories. I chuckle to myself, I have always been passionate about his works. These days new fangled professors of Economics are using computers in their classrooms to explain concepts, in my days the blackboard and chalk had to do, that and our passion for teaching. I fondly conjure up in my head the faces of some of my favourite students all doing extremely well in their careers now. They meet me every once in a long while at my home and we get nostal-gic about our college years. I am getting so woolly-headed now. Why, only yesterday I stirred up my Nescafe with a tea-spoon of salt! I am so thankful to have led a healthy

life-style. My body, though nothing worth ogling at for decades now, doesn't bother me much. "Health is wealth, boy!" my father used to proclaim energetically every morning as he exhorted his two sons out of our bed to put on our jogging shoes. He never tasted a drop of liquor in his life and neither have I. Not even when Rohan got married to that plump girl from down the road and I wanted to end it all. Isabgol takes care of my morning movements and the occasional sniffle is handled by Dr. Pradhan's ministrations.

The rains have departed this year and the second Bombay summer is on us. But my large flat in Dadar is breezy even on the warmest of days and I never feel the boil. I can't stand air conditioners. I look around and spot Mrs. Pitre on her evening toddle. She avoids looking at me. Ever since her husband was thrown out of the society's chairmanship for misappropriation of funds the Pitres have been keeping aloof. She could chatter the hind legs off a donkey, that one. Just two months ago one morning she had kept me uncomfortably standing in my pyjamas for half an hour listening with feigned politeness to an endless diatribe on how "these accursed homosexuals" should all be sent to America so they could stop "corrupting the youth of India"! My crime had been that I had come to retrieve my newspaper at the exact same time that she opened her door to retrieve hers. She raved against the Delhi high court judgement reading down the anti-gay law. By seven I was ready to kill that woman; I had not had a word in edgewise for thirty minutes except uhhms and aahs. Finally I pleaded pressing work and escaped. Thankfully I had kept my homosexuality under wraps from everyone in my building. They thought of me as an eccentric professor of Economics who was married to his books. Kailash had to hunt for a place to stay in the middle of the night in 1975 after his neighbours caught him stark naked nuzzling the neck of a sozzled taxi driver on the staircase. What a scandal that was. He died not long after, poor man, after being badly beaten by thugs one night inside a public urinal. I used to warn him against going to such places but he was driven by the fire in his loins. The police registered a case against person or persons unknown and relegated it to dusty shelves in the backroom. I believe that is where the case file is lying till this day. Life, I ruminate, with its many hues. Mine hasn't been too bad, I reckon. It could have been far worse. It could have been like Madan's. They took him to Dr. Poduri for electroshock therapy for years. He couldn't recognize any of us in the end. A length of clothes-line ended his misery, poor man. His wife upped soon after and got married to a fat banker and migrated to the States. His helpless parents passed away shrouded in loneliness and regrets. Dr. Poduri died of AIDS, I recall to my belligerent satisfaction, which he acquired from all those visits to the nubile whores of Kamathipura. His son is now a pilot in the Indian Air Force. And a handsome piece of goods he is too! He is single, I smile to myself, even at his age...

I met Rohan a year after I came back to India from the University of Glasgow armed with a Masters degree in Economics. I had always wanted to be a lecturer in college. This career has suited me admirably. It has proffered an excellent pokey umbrella against any prying busybody of an aunt or neighbour with a perpetual matchmaker's bent. I was loath to "come out" as the kids nowadays say. I was born in the "closet" and shall remain there. Rohan's case was different. His parents were wealthy and could afford two cars when most of us didn't have any. He was five years older than me and a loner. I would spot him in his expensive suits every morning as he drove by to his father's office.

To read the full story, please visit our website www.pink-pages.co.in



I met Rohan a year after I came back to India from University of Galsgow armed with a masters degree in Economics.

READING LIST: JANUARY 2016

STORMTROOPER FAMILIES: HOMOSEXUALITY AND COMMUNITY IN THE EARLY NAZI MOVEMENT

By Andrew Wackerfuss Harrington Park Press, LLC

Based on extensive archival work, Stormtrooper Families combines stormtrooper personnel records, Nazi Party autobiographies, published and unpublished memoirs, personal letters, court records, and police-surveillance records to paint a picture of the stormtrooper movement as an organic product of its local community, its web of interpersonal relationships, and its intensely emotional internal struggles. Extensive analysis of Nazi-era media across the political spectrum shows how the public debate over homosexuality proved just as important to political outcomes as did the actual presence of homosexuals in fascist and antifascist politics.

As children in the late-imperial period, the stormtroopers witnessed the first German debates over homosexuality and political life. As young adults, they verbally and physically battled over these definitions, bringing conflicts over homosexuality and masculinity into the center of Weimar Germany's most important political debates. Stormtrooper Families chronicles the stormtroopers' personal, political, and sexual struggles to explain not only how individual gay men existed within the Nazi movement but also how the public meaning of homosexuality affected fascist and antifascist politics--a public controversy still alive today.

STROKE - FROM UNDER THE MATTRESS TO OUT IN THE OPEN

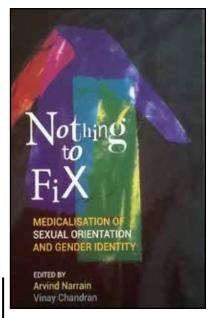
BY: Bruno Gmünder, Berlin

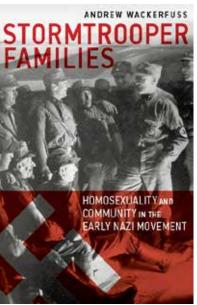
There is nothing like a little prohibition to make things more exciting. In the 1950s, when a large-scale effort was underway to crack down on what was termed "sexual perversion," gay life was pushed into the closet. Regardless of these strictures, gay men still needed to explore their sexuality and true identity. As a result, a number of magazines became widely available. These featured the work of great artists like Tom of Finland and Bob Mizer. Buying one of these publications required an act of courage. These magazines were often hidden away, sometimes under the mattress. Artist legend Robert W. Richards and museum director Hunter O'Hanian rediscover the treasures of gay erotic art and put them together with vividly told stories and previously unpublished material.

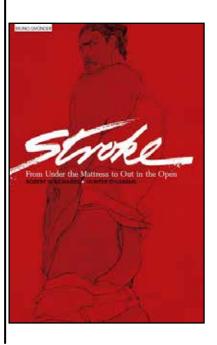
NOTHING TO FIX

Arvind Narrain and Vinay Chandran

The theory and practice of medicine remains central to the concerns of persons identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or others. Individuals who have homosexual desires or feel transgender or are born intersex are often taken against their will to medical professionals. Instead of receiving affirmative support, they have distressing experiences of violence and violations. Everyday struggles of LGBT persons like suicidality and depression are dealt with less sensitively owing to the pathologisation of their identities.







NO ONE ELSE: A PERSONAL HISTORY OF OUTLAWE LOVE AND SEX

BY SIDDHARTH DUBE

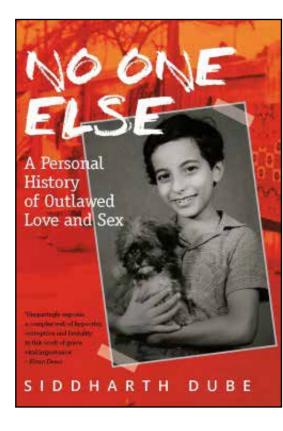
REVIEW BY UDAYAN DHAR

When early African-American writers like Frederick Douglas and Harriet Jacobs told their stories in their classic memoirssuch as 'Narrative of an American Slave'. and 'Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl', they were more than just personal tales of struggle, pain and ultimate triumph. They were also the story of their momentous times- the scope of those books as much social and political, as it was personal. And therefore to label journalistactivist Siddharth Dube's book, 'No one Else: A Personal History of Outlawed Love and Sex' merely as India's first gay memoir would be immense disservice to a book of such global scope, even though at its heart it remains the narrative of a gay Indian man- his coming of age in nineteen-seventies India, his self-discovery in America, and ultimately his love and struggles back home in India.

A book that starts off with an uncensored recollection of ten year old Siddharth

witnessing a strip show by a remarkable transgender performer in Calcutta's Grand Hotel is bound to be revelatory. Siddharth joyously reminisces about the many romantic episodes that came his way during his years at Doon School-India's elite all-boys boarding school, while also shocking the reader with candid tales of brutal abuse. One particular incident that stays fresh in the mind is the near witch-hunt of "homosexuals" at the boarding school where senior students- many of whom were themselves the abusers- began to publicly humiliate and thrash younger boys they knew had allowed themselves to be used sexually. Siddharth's chapters chronicling the Doon years are a stinging indictment of the misogyny and homophobia that is rampant at the institution, mostly ignored and sometimes tacitly encouraged by the school authorities themselves.

The memoir transitions from coming of



age to coming out as the writer describes his move to the United States. There, over the years where he studied at Tufts University and later at the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism, he grew from being a deeply closeted and insecure gay man to being aware, confident and assertive of his sexuality, and his place in the world. He returns to Calcutta to discover his true calling to live and work among the most destitute and underprivileged of the world, and ultimately against his father's advice settles in India while embarking on the first real relationship of his life, with French-Tamil Bharatnatyam dancer Tandavan. Reality however struck them hard as India's anti-gay law, and a malevolent police force wreak havoc with their lives. The vivid recollection of the day they were arrested by the Delhi Police brings home the deep vulnerability of being gay in 1980s India.

What sets apart Siddharth's life, and well as the memoir of course- is the fact that despite the personal hardships and challenges he faces at almost every step- he never fails to recognize that these dwarf in front of the outrages that people like Dominic D'Souza (a young gay man in Goa arrested for being HIV positive under the state's pernicious AIDS prevention laws), or HIV positive female sex workers in Tamil Nadu had to go through. Relentlessly documenting and sharing the stories through his journalism became Siddharth's raison d'etre, and these narratives are presented with the raw pain that they brought into the lives of these individuals, yet without a sense of fatalism. That perhaps is where the strength of his writing lies. Indeed, even before "intersectionality" became common parlance, Siddharth eloquently celebrates this concept very early on while

describing his student years when he realizes that gay men and women are "no different from countless other outcasts... we were part of an even larger community of people who had been marginalized by mainstream society." This remains the underlying theme of Siddharth's focus on the lives and struggles of female sex workers, transgenders and gay men. His accounts of interactions with these marginalized people- most of whom are withering away under the assault of the unsparing AIDS virus, make for intense reading.

Siddharth's passionate work on the HIV/ AIDS epidemic is of course explained by the fact that he himself came of age at a time when the virus was devastating an entire generation of gay men in America. What is striking about the memoir's coverage of the global fight against HIV/AIDS is the fact it never shies away from exposing the hypocrisy and corruption that sadly often accompanied such efforts. For example, when the Secretariat draft of UNAIDS- where Siddharth was working as an advisorreflected the conservative approach of the Bush administration towards dealing with the epidemic among sex-workers, he mentions the subsequent attempts at revision in unbridled reproach- " ... because of the appalling quality of the draft, even the revised one could not meet the standards of earlier strategy documents. To bring it to that quality would have required trashing the draft entirely and writing a stronger one from scratch."

Of course, in a memoir like this the ghost of Section 377- India's infamous colonial era anti-homosexuality law can never be far away, and it isn't. Siddharth finds his compatriot in his namesake-

the passionate young activist Siddharth Gautam, who vehemently believed in and acted for the cause of gay equality in India- most notably through his pioneering report "Less Than Gay. Siddhath Gautam's untimely death leaves a void that never seems to be filled- either personally, or in the field of LGBT advocacy in India. As the legal battle plays out in the Delhi High Court, and later on in the Supreme Court, Siddharth's account of his thoughts and feelings during those days is an articulate reflection of what so many gay men and women across India had to go through. Sadly enough, the wait continues- justice is yet to be delivered.

Siddharth writes without fear- whether it's a description of intimate sexuality, a disclosure of senior level misconduct, or the intense sadness that engulfs him following Siddharth Gautam's death. There is deep empathy in his writing- an underlying awareness of what privilege brings, and how the lack of it devastates liveswhether gay or straight. Siddharth's writing goes beyond facts, towards a deeper understanding of the world we live in- of the myriad forms of inhuman atrocities individuals and groups face- for instance what is the root cause of homophobia globally? Is it ultimately misogyny that causes a small minority of powerful men to use religious and cultural mores to subjugate the fragile majority? The reader does not merely get acquainted with an eventful life, but gets a rare insight into wider social, political and historical realities that are today perhaps more relevant than ever before. This is powerful reading, indeed essential reading- Siddharth Dube's story needs to be told, and told with purposeful urgency.



THE DANCING QUEENS

GLIMPSES OF TRANSGENDER INDIANS

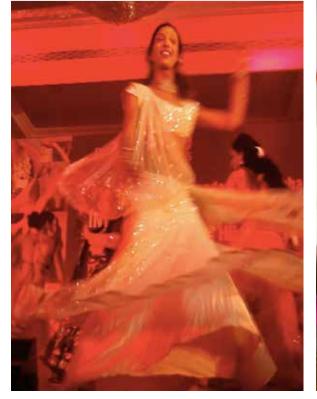
PICTURES BY JEFF ROY

Jeff Roy is a filmmaker, musician, and Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Ethnomusicology at UCLA. Roy has directed and produced two award-winning documentaries surrounding themes of gender and sexuality: Mohammed to Maya (2012) and Music in Liminal Spaces (2013). He is currently a Fulbright Scholar in Residence at the Godrej India Culture Lab and research-

ing on transgender culture in Mumbai.

The Dancing Queens is a transgender-led dance troupe, headed by Abhina Aher, Urmi Jadhav and Madhuri Sarode. The talented members of the group exceed boundaries of personal and ideological expression. Founded initially as part of the Mumbai Pride Festival 2009, the Dancing









through the boundaries formed everyone to be who they want by words. Through sensitive to be and love who they want choreography, the Dancing to love. Queens embodies, promotes,

Queens uses dance to break and fights for the rights of



